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# THE TRIUMPH OF SPRING<sup>1</sup>

## A MAY-DAY MASQUE

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It has been suggested in the editorial columns of the *English Journal* that the approaching Shakspeare tercentenary could most fittingly be celebrated in the schools by means of the presentation of a Shaksperian play, pageant, or fête—something savoring of the whole-hearted merry-making of the “spacious days of good Queen Bess.” It is by reason of this suggestion that I submit to the readers of the *Journal* a May-Day masque of my composition, which, I think, if I may be pardoned for so saying, will be found to lend itself rather readily to the sort of celebration proposed, as it contains some elements of all three of the forms of entertainment mentioned: play, pageant, fête.

In the first place, this masque is not at all “over the heads” of even grammar-school pupils. While there is a slight attempt at literary dignity, and a conscious effort for faint Elizabethan echoes in the diction, the lines are not hard to read. Then, too, although there is a bare thread of plot, the action calls for little more dramatic skill than an ability to enunciate clearly; indeed, the plot is merely a framework for the dances. The dances themselves should lend a strong Elizabethan flavor to the production, as it is intended that they be mainly, if not entirely, reproductions of Morris and other folk-dances—which are now being taught, thanks to the fortunate recent revival of interest in them, to many children, in the schools, on the playgrounds, and at Chatauquas. The mold in which the production is cast—that of an allegorical masque—is also Elizabethan; and though I should scarcely so profane the memories of the mighty dead as to claim any close kinship between my work and theirs, the resemblance is probably sufficient for the purpose.

<sup>1</sup> This masque was first performed by the Senior class of Hamline University in 1914.

The costumes required are very simple, being made entirely of such readily obtainable and cheap materials as cheesecloth, outing flannel, crêpe-paper, and muslin. The Snow Maidens wear robes of white cheesecloth, with flowing sleeves, the inner sides of which are of light blue. The Flowers wear dresses of green crêpe-paper, each bearing on her head a large crêpe-paper blossom of the flower she represents. The Herald wears a kirtle of Lincoln green, cut knee-length, green stockings, and pointed shoon of green muslin; she has a broad red baldric, on which is slung a trumpet (a tin horn covered with gilt paper will answer very well, as someone behind the scenes plays the calls for her on a cornet); her hair is loose, and bound with a chaplet of flowers; in one hand she carries three or four pussy-willows. Ice is all in white; his jacket is cut around the bottom in points, to each of which is attached a glass prism. Snow is also in white, with tufts of cotton sewed to his costume, sprinkled with the artificial snow such as is used under Christmas trees. Winter wears voluminous robes and a turban, all of white outing flannel, and carries a glass scepter; his attendants are also in white. Time wears the conventional grey robes, and carries a scythe. Spring—a golden-haired girl—wears pink cheesecloth. Her retinue and the Villagers are clad variously in muslin and cheesecloth; any good pictures of mediæval or Elizabethan characters will suggest ideas—absolute historical accuracy is not required. Boreas wears white cheesecloth, with a cloak lined with blue. The Spirits of the Frost (small youngsters) are similarly attired, and carry lances with silver tips. Zephyr (a girl) wears light blue cheesecloth, and carries a bellows hung on a baldric. Rain (also a girl) wears a cream robe, and carries a ewer full of water. Thunder is in black, and bears in his hand a sheaf of gilt thunderbolts. Lightning is in orange-yellow, slashed with flame-scarlet. Colin and Piers, the shepherds, wear brown muslin jerkins, with sheep-skin mantles; they are bare-legged, and wear sandals; each has a pair of pipes. Two girls from among the Villagers can serve as Phyllis and Amaryllis. Learning and her train wear caps and gowns, and carry books. Night is in deep blue; she wears a gold crescent upon her forehead, and carries a wand with a single large gold star. The Stars are likewise in deep blue, with small

silver stars sprinkled over their robes, and a large silver star upon each one's forehead; they carry lighted torches. Sleep wears black, and carries a basket of poppies. With these hints as a working basis, teachers should be able to design the costumes.

The masque may be staged indoors or out of doors; if the latter, the performance should begin not long before sunset.

The scene is an open space before a wood. The trees are hung with white cheesecloth and bunches of cotton. A white covering is on the ground (if the performance is given indoors, a green muslin covering should be beneath the white one). To the right of the stage, rear, stands a throne covered with white, flanked by Ice and Snow as guards. To the right, front, lie the Flowers, in chains, banked in white cheesecloth and cotton as if in snow.

The masque opens with the Dance of the Snow Maidens, who enter at left; exeunt at right at the conclusion of the dance. The Herald of Spring enters at the left, her coming being announced by a trumpet call.

*Herald:* Awake, ye Flowers, awake! I bear commands  
 From Spring, that ye should straightway join her court.  
 My clarion blow I o'er the dreaming earth,  
 And at my call the slumbering seeds arouse,  
 The streams shake off their shackles, and the trees  
 Thrust forth in beauty. On the barren lea  
 I plant my footsteps, and where I have pass'd  
 Green grasses wave, and winking Mary-buds  
 Nod welcome to the sun. I fill the winds  
 With multitudinous music, and they breathe,  
 The whole day long, sweet murmurous melodies  
 And vagrant airs of happy Arcady.

Have ye not heard my call? O Flowers, awake!

*Crocus (lifting her head):* We hear thy call, but we cannot obey;  
 Behold, these fetters bind us (*she shows her chains*).

*Primrose:* We are here  
 In durance kept, nor may we break our bonds.

(*The Herald moves as if to release the Flowers; whereupon Ice and Snow rush forward with a restraining gesture.*)

*Ice:* Stay, stay thy hand! These maids are Winter's thralls—  
 By whose authority would ye release them?

*Snow:* Yea, tell us who thou art, with hand so bold,  
 Who durst encroach upon dread Winter's rule.

*Herald:* Spring's Herald I; my badge of office these (*displays pussy-willows*).

By Spring's commission I demand release  
At once of these, thy prisoners. Call hence  
Thy master—I would speak with him.

*Ice:* Behold, e'en now he comes.

(*Enter Winter, right rear, with two attendants.*)

*Winter:* I heard a blast  
Erewhile, methought, that pierc'd my ears, and see  
A stranger here. Speak—tell me what it means.

*Herald:* I am Spring's Herald, and I bear demands  
That all these captive maidens be releas'd,  
Their fetters burst in sunder, and set free  
To join Spring's court. Still further, Spring demands  
That thou give o'er to her all thy demesnes,  
Resign thy throne, and yield into her hand  
The symbols of authority, by thee  
Usurp'd. Already her victorious arms  
Have driven all before them. All thy force  
Is scatter'd, like the mists before the sun,  
And round about on myriad hills and vales  
Her emerald banners flaunt triumphant—yield!

*Winter (aside to Attendants):* I greatly fear, the while that I have  
slept,

My enemies have stol'n upon me. Go:  
Fly with the speed of eagles to the North—  
There, at the utmost limits of the pole,  
Seek out the frigid cave of stern Boreas,  
And bid him with the Spirits of the Frost  
To arm and hasten to my aid.

*Attendants:* We go. (*Exeunt.*)

*Winter (to the Herald):* Thy claims are haughty, and, methinks,  
unkind.

Behold in me a batter'd, worn old man,  
Bow'd down and weary with the weight of days,  
Unfit for strife contentious. Unprepar'd  
Your cohorts find me—how can I oppose

My palsied age to youth's robustious prime?  
 Respect this hoary head—leave me, I pray,  
 At least this one lone fastness, where in peace  
 I may drone out the even of my reign.

*Herald:* Too well I know thy cunning—ere the dawn  
 Thy minions would be gather'd to thy side.  
 To break this hollow truce: I bid thee yield.

*Winter:* Since naught my pray'rs can move thee, know thou, then,  
 I make appeal to Time, to whose decrees  
 Both Spring and I must bend.

*Herald:* Spring did foresee  
 This, thy appeal. Time waits my call without.

*(At a trumpet call from the Herald, enter Time, left front, accompanied  
 by Guards.)*

*Time:* Since I as arbiter am summon'd hence,  
 Hear ye my judgment. *(To Winter.)* Thou hast had thy day,  
 And now thy sway is done. The date is past,  
 Ordain'd thee for thy undisturbèd rule,  
 And Spring but claims her due. For felonies  
 And misdemeanors high I do condemn  
 Both thee and thy two fellows to a cell  
 Deep down within the confines of the earth,  
 To rue in penance meet thy usurpation.  
*(To Guards.)* Away with them! Away! Away!

*(The Guards hale away Winter, Ice, and Snow. The Herald frees  
 the Flowers one by one; they leap up.)*

*The Flowers:* Free! Free!<sup>1</sup>

*Herald:* Make all things ready for the court of Spring,  
 Whom I shall bring to mount her rightful throne.  
 Let sprites who dwell in yonder wood discourse  
 Sweet falls of music, to whose mellow charms  
 Your feet in mystic unison may weave  
 And trace the measur'd mazes of the dance.

<sup>1</sup> If the performance is held indoors, the curtain is lowered for a moment at this point, so that the "snow" may be removed; if the performance is an outdoor one, a group of little girls, the Sunbeams, roll up the white covering, and pull off the cotton from the trees.

## DANCE OF THE FLOWERS

*(Enter Spring with retinue, led by the Herald.)*

*Retinue:* Heigh-ho, the Spring! Heigh-ho, the Spring! Heigh-ho!

*Spring:* At length I come into my own. The last  
Was this of Winter's strongholds—all the land  
Now owns my sway, and here I make my pledge  
To rule in peace. To celebrate this day,  
Let fitting revel straightway be begun,  
With easeful mirth and music's witcheries.  
Blow, Herald, on thy trumpet now a blast,  
And summon hither all the villagers  
In yon near hamlet, who but lately bent  
In cowering chill about their frozen hearths,  
To join our court, with gambols unrestrain'd.

*(The Herald blows a blast.)*

*Herald:* Come hence, all ye, and homage do your Queen. *(Enter Villagers.)*

*Villagers:* All hail the Queen!

*Spring:* We yield into thy hands  
The festal ceremonial of the day.

## MORRIS DANCE

*(Boreas enters, accompanied by the Spirits of the Frost.)*

*Boreas:* I almost fear that we are now too late.  
But hasten! after them! We yet may save  
Old Winter and restore him to his throne.

*(They drive all before them, the Villagers, etc., uttering cries of terror as they flee. Crocus, one of the Flowers, stumbles and falls in a faint. Enter Zephyr, Rain, Thunder, and Lightning.)*

*Thunder:* What ho! Ho there! No answer? This is strange.

*Zephyr:* This is the place appointed—here Spring's court  
Should be establish'd.

*Lightning:* Look you there—  
A fainting maiden on the sward. This bodes  
Some ill—let her be question'd straight.

*Rain:* Fair maid, what means this? Where is all Spring's court.  
And why art thou alone left fainting here? (*She revives  
Crocus with water from her ewer.*)

*Crocus:* While that we were in revelry engag'd,  
There came upon us one of fearful mien,  
Whose very breath was chilling. With him came  
A grisly band, all arm'd with biting spears—  
Those set forthwith upon us, and drove all  
Before them! I alone am left.

*Zephyr:* Ah, so?  
I know them well—'twas my old foe, Boreas,  
And his Spirits of the Frost. But have no fear:  
I know a certain deep and mystic spell,  
Us'd oft by me before, that I can cast  
Upon their eyes, and straight they shall become  
As helpless as the new-born puling babe.  
This is my task. (*To Rain, etc.*) Come ye with me. (*To  
Crocus*) Await thou here.  
And shortly shall thy comrades all return.

*Crocus (rising):* Come back, come back, my happy playmates, come!  
(*Spring and her train re-enter, with Boreas and the Spirits of the Frost  
bound. The Villagers bear with them a Maypole, which they set up.*)

*Spring:* The caitiffs hale away to yon dim cell  
Where Winter and his minions lie confin'd.  
(*To the throng*) Resume your gala rites so rudely broken.

## MAY POLE DANCE

*Spring:* Now, such as will may go: and see ye tell  
To all the countryside that Spring has come,  
And reigns in full dominion—that no more  
Shall Winter do them despite, but that skies  
Henceforward shall be smiling, birds shall sing,  
And brooklets laugh and dance the livelong day.  
(*Enter Colin and Piers, shepherds, piping.*)  
Why pipe so mournfully, ye shepherds, pray?  
This is a time for laughter—name a boon  
That shall dispel this somber melancholy.



*Colin:* Two maids there are who watch with us the sheep,  
 Who scorn the gifts we daily bring to them,  
 And flout our suits. Fair Amaryllis I  
 Besiege—

*Piers:* And Phyllis I—

*Colin:* But all in vain:  
 Give to us for our boon their love, we pray.

*Spring:* Thy boon is granted. Love doth ever wake  
 At call of Spring—these maids shall yield their hearts.  
*(To Attendant)* Go, seek these damsels out on yonder lea,  
 And bring them straightway hither. *(To the Shepherds)*  
 Pluck again  
 Your courage up and plead anew your suit—  
 This time 'twill be receiv'd.

*Both:* We thank thee, Queen.

*(Enter Cupid, leading Amaryllis and Phyllis. After a show of coy hesitancy, the maidens are led by Colin and Piers to a heap of stones, left rear.)*

*Spring:* Sing, maidens, now for us some happy lay  
 Of love and laughter when the heart is young.

*(The girls sing "Drink to me only with thine eyes". As the song ends, a wedding party, led by Cupid, begin to cross the green, singing as they go.)*

*Spring:* Already see the first-fruits of my reign.

*Zephyr:* O Queen, thy holiday lacks one thing yet—  
 Thou hast not summon'd Learning to thy court,  
 Who has nearby an ancient, honor'd seat,  
 Far fam'd through all the land, where arts of peace,  
 And wisdom, and the reverence of the gods  
 Are nurtur'd, and her children sent abroad  
 On deeds of service to the ends of earth.  
 Pray, bid her come.

*Spring:* She shall be summon'd straight.  
 It doth befit most highly that she grace  
 My court, for lowly labor in the common good  
 Best merits exaltation. See, she comes.

*Learning:* Hail, gracious Queen! Most meet it sometimes is  
 To steal away from poring lore of books,  
 And yield the soul to Nature's influence—  
 To laugh awhile with all the laughing brooks,  
 To sing with birds, and be atune with Love:  
 So now thy summons here we gladly heed  
 And join with all around to grace thy triumph.

*Spring:* Come, then a song—some grave and reverend strain  
 As best beseems thy classic cloister'd halls.

*(The school song is here sung.)*

*Spring:* The day draws to its close, the shadows creep,  
 And Night already walks the western hills,  
 Attended by her train of flaming Stars,  
 And Sleep that "knits the ravell'd sleeve of care."  
 They bend their footsteps hither. Now indeed  
 My triumph is complete. *(To Night)* Be gay with us,  
 Dark princess—smile with us a while, and bid  
 The Stars that move august in beauty 'round  
 Thy silent course, trace out some stately measures,  
 The while we hymn the end of this glad day.  
 In one last burst of cadenc'd harmony.

*(The Dance of the Stars follows. The Stars wave their torches in time to the music as they dance. If the production is staged indoors, the Stars carry small electric flashlights which wink on and off; the house being almost dark.)*

#### DANCE OF THE STARS

*Spring:* Come Sleep, kind solacer of weary hearts,  
 And pour sweet balm from out thy store of dreams  
 On all these happy revellers, and seal  
 Their tired eyes with restful drowsyhead.  
*Sleep:* Dream on, dream on— the morrow's dawn shall be  
 All full as fair as this day's joyful close:  
 Wood, field, and lea with sweeter songs shall ring  
 And all the world its homage pay to Spring.

*(As she speaks, she scatters poppies on the crowd, which is now seated.  
 One by one they fall asleep.)*

[Curtain]